DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 251 SO 016 010

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TITLE Schemas and Symbolic Politics: The Cases of Racial and Gender Equality.
PUB DATE 1 Aug 84
NOTE 73p.; Revision of paper presented at the Annual Carnegie Symposium on Cognition (19th, Pittsburgh, PA, May 18-20, 1984) and the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (92nd, Toronto, Canada, August 24-28, 1984) under the title, "Gender Differences in the Electorate: The Role of Values."
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavioral Science Research; Females; Males; Models; *Political Attitudes; *Political Influences; Politics; Public Opinion; Racial Factors; *Schemata (Cognition); Sex Differences; Sex Fairness; Social Science Research; Symbolism

ABSTRACT

A simple symbolic politics model of public opinion is contrasted with a modified version that invokes cognitive organization and affective responses. Evidence is presented from a survey of 314 respondents from the 1982 National Election Study. Responses were obtained to symbols of political equality at different levels of abstraction (general, political, gender, and racial equality) and their effects on policy preferences were analyzed. There was considerable support for the simple symbolic politics approach in that affective responses to equality and other political symbols predicted preferences on women's issues, racial issues, government spending, and support for President Reagan. High levels of consistency existed between attitudes toward objects with similar manifest symbolism, and low levels existed when the objects had very dissimilar symbolism and no plausible schema connected them. The more politically informed were more likely to relate abstract political orientations to policy preferences with different manifest political symbolism when a plausible schema linked the two. Women applied notions of gender equality to political issues more widely than did men. It is suggested that schema use is enhanced by exposure to political information, and that schemas differ in their "basic" level of abstraction. (LH/Author)

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Schemas and Symbolic Politics: The Cases of Racial and Gender Equality

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SO 016 010

Revision of paper presented at the 19th Annual Carnegie Symposium on Cognition, Carnegie-Mellon University, May 18-20, 1984. Also presented at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association in Toronto, 1984, under the title, "Gender Differences in the Electorate: The Role of Values."

August 1, 1984 (3)

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ABSTRACT

A simple symbolic politics model of public opinion is contrasted with a modified version that invokes cognitive organization in addition to affective responses. Evidence is presented from the 1983 Center for Political Studies Pilot Study, a national telephone survey empanelling 314 respondents from the 1982 National Election Study. Responses were obtained to symbols of political equality at different levels of abstraction (general political, gender, and racial equality), and their effects on policy preferences were analyzed. There was considerable support for the simple symbolic politics approach in that affective responses to equality and other political symbols predicted preferences on women's issues, racial issues, government spending, and support for President Reagan. Irrespective of the respondent's information level, high levels of consistency existed between attitudes toward objects with similar manifest symbolism, and low levels existed when the objects had very dissimilar symbolism and no plausible schema connected them. Two findings were more consistent with a schematic variant than with a simple symbolic politics explanation. The more politically informed were more likely to relate abstract political orientations to policy preferences with different manifest political symbolism given a plausible schema existed linking the two. Second, women applied notions of gender equality to political issues more widely than did men. The notion of an equality schema that enhances cognitive consistency and is hierarchically organized was introduced to account for these findings. It is suggested that schema use is enhanced by exposure to political information, and that schemas differ in their "basic" level of abstraction.

A simple symbolic politics theory views the public's political thinking as fairly rudimentary. Public policy issues and voting preferences are seen as based on affective responses to political symbols such as "Liberals," "Blacks," or "Women's Liberation" (Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980). At the other extreme, the appeal of a model describing such simple processing lies partly in the evidence that most members of the general public do not engage in complex ideological thought (Converse, 1964; 1970; 1975). Still, it seems unlikely that the public's political attitudes are so devoid of cognitive structure as this implies. The main purpose of this paper is to explore what elements of a more cognitive theory need to get built back into a simple symbolic politics point of view to describe most faithfully the public's political thinking. Let us start by elaborating that point of view in a little more detail.

A Symbolic Politics Approach

The symbolic politics approach (hereinafter referred to as "simple" symbolic politics) assumes that any political attitudes are formed from the affects conditioned to the specific symbols included in the attitude object.

When an object includes multiple symbols, the net affect toward the total object reflects some simple (e.g., weighted average) combination of the affects toward the constituent symbols. For example, attitudes toward "forced busing" or "voluntary busing" would depend upon affects toward "force," "voluntary," and "busing."

These affects may vary in strength depending upon the strength of prior learning (Sears, 1983a). The strongest have been called "symbolic predispositions"

to connote their particular persistence and power (Sears and Citrin, 1982). Among the most basic and longstanding are such attitudes as party identification, racial prejudice, nationalism, and so on. Others are now being brought into more intensive consideration, especially liberal or conservative self-designations (Conover & Feldman, 1981), and ostensibly non-political values such as individualism (Lukes, 1973; Feldman, 1983), egalitarianism (Rokeach, 1969; 1973), and post-materialism (Inglehart, 1977; 1979).

Treating such predispositions as symbolic attitudes is appealing because it allows us to recognize their widespread use by the mass public without assuming that many people hold abstract ideologies in the forms familiar to political elites. Indeed, in its simplest form, a symbolic politics formulation would assume that affects are tied quite closely to the manifest symbolic content of a particular attitude object, without considering underlying or latent meanings. In that sense attitudes toward objects of different manifest content, but meaningful underlying links, can be quite compartmentalized.

Yet there are several problems with interpreting such predispositions solely from this simple symbolic politics point of view. These difficulties suggest that it may be necessary to combine the simple symbolic politics viewpoint with some notion of cognitive structure to get a more satisfactory view of public thinking.

One problem is that considerable underlying consistency exists between attitudes with different manifest symbolic contents but similar latent meaning. If only attitude objects with the same manifest symbolic content attract consistent affects, there should be little correlation between

responses to what appear to be very different symbols. Indeed, consistent with this symbolic politics approach, objects with different manifest content but closely related underlying meaning frequently need very different marginal frequencies, such as "busing" and "school integration," "free speech for all" and "Communists allowed to teach in the public schools," or "smaller government" and "cutting spending for the police." However, many of these manifestly dissimilar items are highly correlated even when they yield great inconsistencies in marginal frequencies, especially regarding civil liberties, tax and spending, support for political authorities, and racial integration (Zellman & Sears, 1971; Sears, 1982; 1983b; Sears & Citrin, 1982; Sullivan et al, 1982; Sears & Allen, 1984). Moreover, they often load on the same factor in factor analyses, and share antecedants and consequences in more elaborate causal models, as in the case of tax and spending preferences (Sears & Citrin, 1982). So there is reason to believe that such manifestly disparate symbols, despite attracting quite inconsistent marginal frequencies, are being responded to with fairly consistent affects. This correlation of affects across manifestly unrelated symbols would seem to imply some degree of underlying cognitive structure, contrary to a simple symbolic politics theory.

The second problem concerns abstraction. Some systematic differences have been recorded between public responses to abstract and those to concrete attitude objects, suggesting that level of abstraction of attitude objects, in and of itself, may lead to differences in response. For example, it seems easier for people to be negative toward abstract symbols than toward their

more concrete counterparts. "Government" and "politicians" seem easier to dislike than "the schools" or one's local congressman. It is possible that such a systematic difference is pure coincidence, but that seems unlikely. Nor do such differences seem in every case to be attributable to the differences in manifest symbols of abstract and concrete objects, which would be the crucial matter for a simple symbolic politics theory. If abstraction, in and of itself and irrespective of symbolic content, produces systematic differences in response, a more cognitive theory is required.

The third set of problems emerge from the effects of information. A simple symbolic politics theory would predict that increased information would do no more than enhance consistency between affects associated with symbols that are themselves frequently paired in the information environment. There is good evidence that information does increase consistency. Media exposure does increase the consistency of manifestly dissimilar attitudes, such as policy preferences and voting intentions (Klapper, 1960; Sears & Chaffee, 1979). Stronger information flow does enhance consistency of policy preferences with basic symbolic predispositions (Converse, 1962; Sears et al, 1980). But the fact that information increases the use of political abstraction requires some additional assumptions (Converse, 1964; Campbell et al, 1960). This also points to the need for invoking underlying cognitive structures.

A Schematic Version of Symbolic Politics

The need for notions of cognitive structure, and especially hierarchical structures that embody variations in abstraction, leads us to general models of social cognition as developed in social psychology. One is the concept of a schema (Taylor & Crocker, 1981). Schematic processing implies application of cognitive structures that involve both cognitive consistency and some degree of hierarchical organization. A second notion is that there is a "basic level" of abstraction providing for the optimal level of categorization (Rosch, 1978). This presumably varies across domains with the individual's degree of information and sophistication. For example, the "basic level" of categorizing snow is for most of us very abstract; either it is snowing or it is not. For Eskimos and cross-country skiers, of course, a more concrete level is most basic. Similarly, for any given person the basic level will vary across domains. For example, an expert on the subtleties of government bureaucracy may wish to process information about government at the level of specific agencies, but he may be so ignorant about the Catholic Church that he simply processes it at the most abstract level ("the $*?! Church").

The schema literature, and indeed much social cognition research, argues that people act to minimize cognitive effort; they act as cognitive misers (Taylor, 1981). Schemas result in a more abstract level of thinking that is simpler than the more costly processing of detailed, concrete levels. Hence we tend to group concrete instances together into more abstract categories (e.g., "all those issues are just different versions of The Women's Issue").

However, such abstraction can lead to all the perils of oversimplification and preclude recognition of important distinctions, as amply documented in the literatures on (and critiques of) racial prejudice and stereotyping.

One problem with applying schema theory is that the role of affect, the key element of symbolic politics, has been quite unclear in schema theory. Most schema research has been generated out of cognitive theories that are unconcerned with affect, and has been conducted with content having little affective meaning. Recently Fiske and Pavelchak (1983) have begun to develop theory about schematic processing of contents with strong affective loading, calling it "category-based" processing. But this line of work is still in its beginning stages.

Where does all this leave us? Most researchers would agree that the mass public is not well-described in terms of the very cognitive hierarchical structure. We have described a simple version of symbolic politics theory that portrays people as responding to political symbols in terms of simple, compartmentalized affects. As useful as this simple version of symbolic politics theory may be, it seems wise to raise the possibility of adding to it some assumptions about hierarchical cognitive structure. Our primary goal, then, is to explore the implications of expanding a simple symbolic politics theory to include notions of cognitive schema and categorization.

Values about Social Equality

This schematic approach to symbolic politics could potentially be tested empirically in any content area in which substantial numbers of people are likely to have political schemas. In particular, our data concern values

about political equality, and policy preferences concerning women's and blacks' rights. Equality for women and blacks are potent contemporary political issues, and central to current debates over national policy. Values are thought of as relatively stable, and as having considerable predictive utility (Feldman, 1983; Rokeach, 1973).

Values about equality is also a useful content area for our purpose because it can potentially evoke strongly affective reactions to relevant symbols, and relevant attitudes can potentially be organized in a hierarchical manner. Values may be described as affects associated with a particular symbol; e.g., if we value equality, we have a positive evaluation of the symbol "equality." Other equality-related symbols such as "busing" or "women's lib" also can evoke great affect. At the same time, values have the potential for schematic organization, whether hierarchical, horizontal, or both. We might view equality hierarchically, since values concerning equality can potentially be quite abstract as well as having many quite concrete applications to specific issues. We might value equality in general, but we might or might not view equality for such specific groups as blacks, women, or Palestinians as being interdependent with that general view. Similarly, valuing equality for one group (e.g., blacks) may or may not be perceived as horizontally interdependent with valuing it for others (e.g., the retarded). So the use of equality values in our empirical work has considerable potential for the exploration of our theoretical concerns, providing both an issue domain with the proper potential for schematic thinking, and an area with substantial affective and political vitality.

What would a simple symbolic politics approach to values be? Assume that the elements of a value structure are affectively-loaded symbols. Presumably, these can be quite abstract (e.g., "equality") or quite concrete (e.g., "equal access to public accommodations for blacks and whites"). A simple further assumption is that the basic symbols are modular, in the sense that the affective loading of more complex ones is a simple function of the affective loading upon their modular components. Hence the evaluation of "equality for blacks" might be a simple function (presumably a weighted average) of the separate evaluations of "equality" and "blacks" (Anderson, 1972; Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955).

An application of a schematic variant would add the notion of a hierarchical value structure, with differing levels of abstraction. Lower levels of abstraction would incorporate beliefs in personal or political equality and at more specific levels this would become a belief in equality for various minority groups. The form of the structure is pyramidal, with the top being most abstract. An example is given in Figure 1. Four levels of a hierarchical equality schema might be distinguished:

(1) General values. A general belief in "equality," independent of context, would be the most abstract level. This is essentially the level measured by Rokeach (1969).

(2) The next most abstract level assigns values to a more specific context, such as political or personal values, as advocated by Marsh (1975) and implemented by Conover and Feldman (1984). Inglehart's (1977) post-materialist political values (e.g., "maintaining order in the nation") would fit here. One could

imagine other contexts, as people compartmentalize in other ways; e.g., wartime vs. civilian, or in the old days vs. today.

(3) Various content domains, or domain-specific values, mark the next level. We might have one set of political equality values concerning blacks, and quite another concerning women, for example.

(4) The issue context adds another level: issue positions. For example, "busing" or "affirmative action" pose somewhat different, though possibly related, symbols.

A simple symbolic politics approach predicts that embedding abstract values in a more specific context, whether the context be "domain-specific" or that of a particular issue, should produce some weighted average of value and context. Support for "equality for blacks" ought to be a function of support for equality in general and affect toward blacks. So constraint across levels of the hierarchy shown in Figure 1 ought simply to be a function of similarity in manifest symbolism across levels.

There is evidence consistent with this symbolic politics view from a number of sources. Setting such abstract values in a more specific context does seem to alter their impact in this predictable manner. Feldman (1983) found, for example, that individualistic values had a considerably different impact when they focused only upon blacks as stimulus persons. Marsh (1975) argues that when values are phrased in a personal context they have a considerably different impact than when they are phrased in a political context; Conover and Feldman (1984) certainly find this to be true, as would be

anticipated from the literature on self-interest (e.g., Sears et al, 1980), sociotropic politics (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979), or relative deprivation (Vanneman & Pettigrew, 1972). And finally Sears and Citrin (1982) note the widely obtained finding that support for government and government services increases enormously as they are described in more specific, concrete terms; e.g., people want "smaller government" by more than 2 to 1, but they support increased funding for most concrete service areas (e.g., public health) and report favorable encounters with bureaucrats (Katz et al, 1975).

However, the schematic point of view departs from this simple linear prediction. The relationships between values and specific issue positions should depend on which level of abstraction is the "basic" level. This could be any of the levels we have presented. Which one is "basic" would tend to vary with the person's expertise, knowledge, and interest levels in the domain under investigation. The general prediction from schema theory should be that the basic level would be more concrete for the most informed people (Linville & Jones, 1980). Hence the more expert, informed, and interested people in the issue domain in question should be more likely to apply a very specific version of equality to their opinions about public policy.

Note that this schematic variant also contrasts with the usual expectation in the political behavior literature that abstract ideologies are used most by the best informed people, whether they are elites such as congressional candidates (Converse, 1964) or simply the most informed members of the general public (Sears et al, 1980). However this research has not explicitly varied level of abstraction, so it has not tested this schematic proposition directly.

Moreover, Converse's (1975) notion of "issue publics" suggests that constraint might be quite domain-specific for people with a strong interest in a particular domain. Put another way, people in a particular issue public may have a "local schema" for that domain, which may or may not be highly interdependent with the remainder of that person's political thinking. Hence the schematic approach may reopen some of these questions about the mass public's belief systems.

The major purpose of this paper, then, is to elaborate and test the differences between simple symbolic politics theory, and a schematic variant. That implies that people frequently have political schemas about content areas that are more narrowly defined than is the case in a highly cognitive treatment of ideology; that these schemas are to some extent hierarchically organized; that they are strongly controlled by the affects that people have toward the symbols within the schema; and that stable, consistent responses to political symbols may be contingent upon which level is the "basic" one for that individual. Hence stable responding may depend on the individual's having some schema about the symbol, even if a rather local one.

How would we be able to tell the difference empirically? There are probably a number of crucial contrasts, but among them would be the following. In a simple symbolic politics theory, pure affect toward political symbols should have a major political impact; in the schematic variant, such affects would have effects only when some schema surrounds the symbol. Second, schematic processing implies that processing occurs differentially and in different ways at different levels of abstraction, whereas the simple symbolic

politics theory would suggest that differences in abstraction are unimportant; one's reactions to highly abstract symbols can be just as immediate and emotional as reactions to very concrete symbols. Third, high levels of political sophistication should be important contributors to consistency and other indicators of the quality of political information processing in the schematic variant; it should matter little in a pure symbolic politics theory because all the individual needs to do is match manifestly similar symbols. Finally, the schematic variant implies some population or group differences in processing. Individuals with schemas for a political domain ought to process information more quickly and consistently than those with no schemas, and it is likely that different groups will differ in the incidence of such schemas.

Methods

Sample

The data come from the 1983 National Election Studies Pilot Study. Three hundred and fourteen surviving members of a panel originally interviewed as part of the 1982 National Election Study were reinterviewed in the summer of 1983. The sample contained more women than 1982 population gender estimates (59% vs. 53%), similar percentages of minorities, was better educated, slightly older and more politically involved. The sample was interviewed in two different subgroups which were given slightly different series of questions.

Equality Values

An additive scale of general political equality values was created from six items, one dealing with equality of treatment, two with equality of opportunity, and three with leadership ability (hereinafter referred to as "anti-elitism")(these items are shown in Appendix A). Equality of opportunity and treatment were strongly supported, anti-elitism was not, and the final scale mean represented an item average of just above three on the five-point scale. The six-item scale did not have high internal consistency (alpha=.44) although a shorter three-item scale from which the anti-elitism items were dropped was more consistent (alpha=.55).

The six general political equality items were minimally reworded for the gender and racial contexts, generally by substituting the symbols "woman" or "blacks" for "people," as shown in Appendix A. The gender equality scale exhibited greater internal consistency than did the general political equality scale (α=.71) and had a higher overall scale mean. The reason for this was the endorsement of gender anti-elitism. It appears that elitism was supported at an abstract level, but not when the issue was gender elitism. The racial equality scale was also reasonably internally consistent (α=.64). The anti-elitism items again lowered the reliability of the scale, but in this instance because these items were so overwhelmingly supported. Gender equality items were asked only of respondents in the first subgroup (N=143), and racial equality items of respondents in the second subgroup (N=131).

Issue Position Scales

Our main dependent variables consist of four equality issues: three affecting women (government aid to women, beliefs about women's roles in society, and the desirability of collective action to attain women's rights), and one on blacks' rights. Two additional dependent variables involve more distal potential political consequences of support for equality: support for greater spending on government services, and opposition to Ronald Reagan. All issue position scales were constructed by standardizing and adding relevant items. Factor Analyses were used to help guide item selection.

Women's issues. Positions on three sets of issues relevant to women were measured. A government involvement scale was formed from two items on affirmative action, one on government involvement in women's issues, and one on equal pay (α=.77). A second scale measured approval of collective political action by women, consisting of two items which correlated significantly but not extremely highly (r=.32). Four items on non-traditional beliefs about women's roles, Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, and gender differences in drive and ambition were standardized and added, yielding a moderately internally consistent scale (α=.58).

A racial policy preference scale was based on four items: aid to minorities and endorsements of governmental role in improving the position of blacks, promoting school integration and affirmative action. The scale had high internal consistency (α=.80). A government social spending scale was constructed from six variables: an additive scale measuring preferences for spending on health, education, and other social services; and government action on improvement of the standard of living, jobs for the unemployed, and

minimizing the income gap. This scale had high internal consistency (α=.81). The five-item Reagan scale included an evaluation of Reagan's job performance, the Reagan feeling thermometer, and the respondents' vote intentions pitting Reagan against Mondale, Glenn, or Kennedy, yielding high internal consistency (α=.89).

Group Affects

Thermometer ratings (on a 0-100 scale) of affective reactions to 14 groups were obtained. Group ratings were standardized with respect to the respondent's reactions to all 14 groups. For example, evaluations of blacks were subtracted from the individual's mean rating across all 14 groups and divided by the standard deviation of these 14 scores. On the basis of factor analyses, two scales relating to women were formed, one summing affects toward "women" and toward "working women," the other, "feminists" and "supporters of women's liberation." Affective reactions to "blacks" were also used in the analysis.

Information

A general political information scale was based on three subscales: (a) Political candidates. Respondents were asked their familiarity with several national political candidates. A scale of knowledge of political candidates was based on familiarity with Anderson, Bush, Mondale, and the 1982 Republican and Democrat House candidates. Seventy-two percent of respondents were familiar with all politicians. (b) House candidates issue positions. Respondents were asked whether they knew their congressional candidates' positions on four issues. The scale reflected the number of

issues on which the respondent expressed knowledge of at least one candidate's position; 54% knew at least one candidate's position on all four issues. (c) Party control. Respondents were asked which party was in the majority in the House and the Senate before the 1982 election. All three subscales were then standardized and combined to form the overall information scale.

A scale was also constructed to measure information about women's issues in particular. Respondents indicated whether they knew the stances taken on women's issues by the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, the non-preferred party's House candidate, and the Federal Government; 46% knew the positions of all four.

Political Orientations and Demographics

The standard NES measures for assessing liberal/conservative ideology, party identification, and basic demographic variables were also used. Information about current working status for either the respondent or their spouse was collected and from this an index was constructed for the presence of a working female in the household.

Values as Predictors of Policy Preferences

The general plan of the analysis will be first to show the political importance of values concerning equality, by demonstrating that they are significant predictors of domestic policy preferences above and beyond the effects of such standard predictors as demographic variables, party identification, and ideology. Second, we will assess the evidence for a simple

symbolic politics theory. And third, we will turn to evidence suggesting the need for a schematic variant of the symbolic politics approach.

The contributions made by demographic variables and conventional political orientations to our policy preference dependent variables are on the whole rather predictable. Table 1 presents separate multiple regression equations for each dependent variable. They show strong demographic effects mainly with racial issues, generally conceded to be the most socially divisive in America. Ideology clearly has a strong effect on almost all, while party identification influences only the most explicitly partisan dependent variable, opposition to President Reagan. These results assure us that our dependent variables are in general predictable at expected levels and in expected ways.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

General equality values also have significant effects on three of the dependent variables, as shown in Table 1. And domain-specific values had significant effects in five of six cases.

Most important, there is clear evidence of the independence of equality values from general liberal-conservative ideology.[1] That equality values add significantly to the prediction of issue preferences on group equality even with ideology taken into account can be seen in two ways. First, equality values have significant effects in most cases even with ideology included in the equation, as just indicated. Second, equality values add significantly to ideology in variance explained. This can be seen by subtracting the R^2

for regression equations with demographics, standard political orientations and equality values as predictors (Table 2, row 4) from equations that do not include the equality values (Table 2, row 1). The equality values add anywhere from 16% to 24% to R^2 on the four issues most directly concerned with equality (women's and racial issues), and modest amounts on the two partisan dimensions (6% on each). So it seems clear that equality values, whether general or specific to a given group, have strong effects on policy preferences independent of general ideology. These data would seem to support a symbolic politics approach to equality values, then, since "equality" seems to serve as a potent symbol quite independent of the more conventional political predispositions.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

A Simple Symbolic Politics Theory vs. a Schematic Variant

Our strategy in this paper is first to make explicit some of the implications of a simple symbolic politics theory, determine empirically their strengths and weaknesses, and then develop the implications of a more cognitive schematic variant that would help provide a more complete theory.

These implications fall into four general categories:

(1) People should respond with consistent affects whenever they are presented with a given symbol, such as those used throughout our data: "equality," "women," and "blacks." This should result in high levels of consistency across items with common symbols at the same level of abstraction;

e.g., across items measuring gender equality values. It should also result in high levels of consistency across items sharing common symbols but at different levels of abstraction; e.g., between gender equality values and support for policies remedying gender inequality.

(2) Consistent responses to items at different levels of abstraction should be produced by common affective responses to symbols shared by such items. Thus support for domain-specific values (e.g., gender equality) ought to be based in positive reactions to the general value (e.g., equality) and the group in question (e.g., women). Similarly, support for policies benefitting a particular social group ought to be partially determined by affects toward that group. Thus consistency between domain-specific values and policy support for a particular group should be mediated by common positive affects toward that group and toward equality in general.

(3) The impact of values upon issue positions ought generally to be unaffected by information level, according to a symbolic politics theory, since consistency between the two would depend upon their manifest similarity in symbols rather than upon the cognitive connections that information could provide. A schematic variant would predict some important effects of information flow in producing dependence of issue positions on values, since information flow could prime the use of more complex cognitive structures such as schemas. From this perspective schemas are thought of as having a fixed structure that is widely shared among the public. People differ in the extent to which they use the schema and political information flow is seen as one source that stimulates schema activation. This view of schemas

has its parallel in person perception research in which the structure and content of schemas does not vary greatly between individuals but frequency of activation via priming does (Higgins & King, 1981; Wyer & Srull, 1981).

(4) Attitudes at different levels of abstraction should be processed in approximately the same way, except insofar as they differ in symbolic content, according to a simple symbolic politics theory. A schematic variant, on the other hand, leads to a different set of predictions. So far we have discussed schemas as structures commonly shared that do not differ between individuals, but there is a large body of research from social cognition that deals with individual differences in cognitive structure and content. This work is often investigated within the context of the cognitive processes of novices and experts. As experts develop their schemas they become more abstract (Abelson, 1976) and more complex (Linville, 1982; Linville & Jones, 1980). These mature schema are more organized and more complexly hierarchical than those of novices (Chi & Koeske, 1983). From this and categorization research (Rosch, 1978) has developed the idea that there is a "basic level" of abstraction at which people process information most readily. This "basic level" may differ across content areas, or between groups or individuals even with symbolic content held constant.

Pursuing a Simple Symbolic Politics Theory

Symbolic Similarity Produces Consistency

First of all, a simple symbolic politics theory would expect consistent affects toward any given symbol, such as "equality," or equality for groups

such as "women" or "blacks," across different contexts. Thus different items invoking a particular symbol at a common level of abstraction should evoke consistent affects. One test of this implication comes from the inter-item reliabilities in each of these areas. The Cronbach's Alpha for general equality values is .44, using the full six-item scale; with the weakest three items deleted, it is .55. Although this is some evidence for consistent affects toward the symbol "equality" in different contexts, it is not terribly impressive.

Equality for a specific group attracts much more consistent affects. The reliabilities for the two six-item gender and racial equality value scales are .71 and .64, respectively. The same underlying affective consistency emerges from the two dependent variable scales dealing with explicit equality for women and blacks (government involvement with women and racial issues). The reliabilities of these scales were .77 and .81, respectively. Why the consistency is greater when respondents are responding to two sets of paired symbols, "equality" for "women," or "equality" for "blacks," will be considered below.

The symbolic politics process should also result in consistent affects to constant symbols presented at different levels of abstraction. One consequence is that issue positions should be derived from affects toward the symbols presented by the issue. In the present instance, consider issues involving equality for a specific group. Both general equality values and the domain-specific value containing a specific reference to that group should contribute to issue positions regarding that group, but not to issue positions

regarding other groups or to those irrelevant to groups. As expected, then, Table 2 shows that issue positions focused on equality for a specific group are influenced by either general political or domain-specific equality values when each is considered separately. That is, support for government action to promote equality for women and blacks (columns 1 and 4) is influenced by either general equality values (adding 8% and 9% to R^2; compare rows 1 and 2) or domain-specific values (15% and 22%; compare rows 1 and 3). Both sets of values together add 16% and 24%, respectively, to variance explained (row 9).

Moreover, these equality values have only weak effects upon issue positions not explicitly concerned with these groups' equality. As also shown in Table 2 (row 9), equality values added very little to the explanation of the composite scale on government spending or opposition to Ronald Reagan -- about 6% in variance explained in each case. The individual betas for the value variables tended not to be significant either (Sears, Huddy, & Schaffer, 1984).

Finally, the domain-specific values turn out to be much more potent predictors of issue preferences than do the general political values. The appropriate index for this direct comparison is the unique contribution each makes to R^2 above and beyond the shared variance both contribute. Considering all three women's issues, domain-specific (gender) values add 8%. 23%, and 15% to variance explained, whereas general political equality values add only 1%, 0%, and 0%, respectively. Concerning racial issues, general values add 9%, whereas racial equality adds 22%. These data are shown in Table 2 (rows

10 and 11). All of this does not mean that "equality" has no effect as a symbol in and of itself. The general equality values had some strong effects, as can be seen by comparing rows 1 and 2 in Table 2. But clearly the more potent effects occurred from the domain-specific values, when particular group symbols were paired with the symbol "equality."[2]

These findings indicate greater consistency of affective response to the "equality" for a specific group than to the symbol of equality by itself, in two ways. The reliabilities for the domain-specific value scales are higher than those for the general political value scale, even though the wording varied only the reference to a specific group. And the domain-specific values had much more influence upon issue positions than did the general political values. Why should the more concrete attitudes have stronger effects than the more abstract ones?

A partial explanation is that the domain-specific values are the more symbolically similar to the issues, since both contain symbols of equality mixed with references to the specific group. This would not explain the greater inter-item reliability of the domain-specific values, however; a series of items on equality for people in general ought to be just as similar to each other as a series of items on equality for a particular group. Rather, the symbolic politics approach would have to assume that the group symbol is more affectively potent than is the equality symbol, and therefore overrides its lesser reliability in the domain-specific items. For that reason we next turn to affects toward the groups themselves.

The Role of Group Affect

A simple symbolic politics perspective predicts that attitudes toward any given object will be a function of affects toward its separate constituent symbols. In the present context, this reasoning suggests the two-step process depicted in Figure 1: (1) general equality values and affect toward a particular group ought to determine domain-specific values regarding that group, which (2) in turn ought to determine issue positions on policies affecting equality for that group. Any effect of general values and group affect upon issue positions ought, by this reasoning, to be fully mediated by the domain-specific values. For example, affect toward women, or toward activist classes of women such as "feminists" or "women's liberation," should be (along with general equality values) crucial determinants of support for gender equality, which in turn should determine support for government policies designed to achieve gender equality.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The first proposition is that support for domain-specific equality values should be determined by affect toward their two constituent symbols: general political equality and affect toward the group in question. To test for this, two multiple regression equations were employed, predicting either gender or racial equality from general equality values and the appropriate group affect.

In both cases one part of the expectation is fulfilled quite handsomely: domain-specific values were influenced quite strongly by general political equality, with betas of .46 and .43 for gender and racial equality, respectively. The general symbol "equality" clearly influenced application of

equality to specific groups. Group affect had the expected role with respect to gender equality; "feminism" contributed a significant beta of .26, and "women," a non-significant .12. Together the two dimensions of affect yielded a respectable R^2 of .32 and the full model, an R^2 of .306. However, racial equality values were not predicted as well by this simple model. Race affect made little contribution to racial equality values (a non-significant beta of .11), and the total R^2 for general equality values and race affect on racial equality values was a disappointing .196.

A second implication is that group affect should influence issue positions regarding equality for that group, but not those regarding some other group, or issue positions that do not concern groups. Here the evidence is again rather mixed. Gender and racial affects have only trivial impact on the issue positions most centrally concerned with group welfare, contributing 4% of the variance to support for government involvement with women, and 0% to racial issues, respectively (see Table 2, row 12). Paradoxically, gender affect contributes substantially (22% and 10%) to the two gender issues more remotely concerned with group welfare, traditional role and collective action.[3] As would be expected from the symbolic politics approach, the impact of group affects upon issue positions is specific to the group in question; racial affect contributes almost nothing to positions on the three women's issues over and above demographics and political orientation (betas of -.07, -.02, and -.17). The only exception is for collective action. Gender affect contributes little to positions on racial issues (beta for women and working women = .11, for feminists and women's liberation = -.04) within the whole

sample. And as also would be expected, affect toward these group symbols contributes nothing to the two issues that have nothing to do with groups -- government spending and opposition to Reagan (R^2 = 3% and 2%, respectively).

We have already seen that domain-specific equality values have a powerful impact upon issue positions bearing on equality for that group (Tables 1 and 2). A third implication of the symbolic politics model is that this impact should be fully accounted for by affects toward the two constituent symbols: the group and general equality. If so, domain-specific values should have no effect on issue positions when general political equality and group affect are considered. But even with these predictors in the equation, domain-specific values retain their pre-eminent predictive power. This can be seen most clearly in Table 1. For the three women's issues, gender equality values retain the dominant predictive role, and for racial issues, racial equality values are by far the most important factor. Domain-specific values remain the strongest predictors of issue positions, even with general values and group affect considered.

In short, group affect seems not to have the clear and consistent role that might have been expected for it in a simple symbolic politics theory. Racial affect has uniformly little effects, influencing neither racial equality values nor positions on racial issues. Affect toward "feminists" and "women" do better, in that they do significantly influence both gender equality values and relevant issue positions in most cases. However, there is some softness in the evidence even here. Gender affects do not influence positions on the seemingly most relevant issue (government involvement in

women), they do not mediate the effects of gender values on gender issues, and the most influential affects are toward symbols not explicitly mentioned in the value and issue items ("feminism" and "women's liberation") rather than toward the symbol that is mentioned ("women"). All told, this seems to be a modest return from perhaps the most straightforward expectation of a simple symbolic politics view.

Pursuing a Schematic Variant

The foregoing data suggest some difficulties with the simple symbolic politics theory. In particular, level of abstraction seems to have some effects that cannot be explained in terms of symbolic content. The next two sections test explicitly some implications of a schematic variant of the simple symbolic politics theory.

The Role of Information Flow

A simple symbolic politics approach suggests that values determine issue positions only when both share the same manifest symbolic content. The amount of information exposure should not materially alter this link since the overlap of symbolic content should be evident with or without repeated exposure. There is evidence, however, that schema use can be primed by recent and frequent activation (Higgins & King, 1981; Wyer & Srull, 1981). Political information flow should therefore enhance schema use via frequent evocation of the schema. When a linking schema is evoked attitudes toward elements should become more consistent. In this context

we mean "information flow" only to describe crudely the information to which the individual has been and is being exposed. This could be indexed directly by measuring the flow itself (e.g., media exposure or interpersonal communication) or indirectly by measuring its product (e.g., the individual's store of political information). Here we have chosen the latter alternative.

To arrive at the predictions these two theories would make, we must consider the two attitude objects upon which the value and issue position are focused. These pairs of attitude objects may vary both in their manifest symbolic similarity, and in the likelihood that widespread underlying schemas exist linking them. Symbolic similarity and possible underlying schemas may exist in three important combinations.

At the one extreme are pairs of attitude objects whose manifest symbols are so similar that they can be cognitively linked with very little additional information or repetitive association. An example would be gender equality values and women's equality issues. In this case, both theories would predict high levels of consistency irrespective of information flow.

At the other extreme would be pairs of attitude objects that share no manifest symbolism, and for which there may or may not be a widespread latent schema in existence that links them. On the surface, it would appear that beliefs about racial equality, while dissimilar from women's issues, could be linked together within an equality schema. It is less likely that a schema exists associating either feeling toward Reagan or support for government spending with racial or gender equality beliefs.

Intermediate cases would be those in which the attitude objects are manifestly dissimilar, but some underlying schema links the attitude objects in the information environment and/or within considerable segments of the general public. In these cases of dissimilar symbols, a simple symbolic politics theory would suggest that even high levels of information flow would not produce great consistency, given the dissimilarity in manifest symbolism between the two sets of attitude objects. On the other hand, a schematic variant would lead us to expect higher levels of consistency among more informed persons and low levels of consistency than among the uninformed. When such underlying schemas exist, information flow ought to help evoke them, and in so doing, create greater consistency between values and issue positions. However, among the uninformed, when schemas exist linking values with issues, the unifying schema is not likely to be evoked without exposure to information.

To test these ideas, we needed to compare the effects of our by-now standard predictors upon the issue positions of highly informed as opposed to poor informed respondents, under specified conditions of manifest symbolic similarity and probable underlying schemas. In doing this we use two kinds of regression tables. When comparisons are made between political issues standardized beta weights are used that adjust for differences in the variability of the dependent variables (Table 4). When, however, comparisons are between subgroups but deal with the same dependent variable, the appropriate table contains the unstandardized beta weights (Table 3). Table 3 presents the unstandardized coefficiants from four regression equations for

each dependent variable. Separate regressions are presented for respondents high and low in general political information within each of the two subgroups in the sample. Table 4 presents the standardized coefficients from the same equations.

[Insert Tables 3 and 4 about here]

Similar manifest symbolism. When the attitude objects are very similar, both theories would expect high levels of consistency, irrespective of information flow. Specifically, domain-specific equality values should have strong effects upon issue preferences regarding that particular group's equality, whether or not the respondent is highly informed. This expectation is borne out quite clearly in the data. The top three panels of Table 3 show that the effects of gender equality values on gender equality issues are very strong and significant in all cases, whether or not the respondent is well-informed. For the highly informed, the betas range from .40 to .69; for the poorly informed, from .30 to .52, as shown in Table 4. Similarly, racial equality values have a strong impact on racial issues irrespective of respondent information level, as shown in the fourth panels of Tables 3 and 4 (the betas are .55 and .33, respectively). In all these cases there is some slightly greater impact of domain-specific values among high than among low information respondents, but the difference is not very great. The clearest finding is that specific values invariably have a strong and significant effect on issue positions when the two attitude objects share common symbolism, even among the poorly-informed.

Dissimilar symbolism, no probable schema. A second expectation from either theory would be that equality values would have little effect upon support for President Reagan no matter what the individual's information. This is also supported. The bottom panels of Tables 3 and 4 show that all but one of the eight terms for general or domain-specific values are non-significant, with no evidence for significant effects even among the informed. In the absence of either symbolic similarity or prior schemas that can be activated, even high levels of information flow do not produce high levels of consistency.

Dissimilar symbolism, probable schema. The expectations of a simple symbolic politics view deviate from those of a schematic variant most clearly when the manifest symbols of the predictor attitude differ from those of the dependent variable and it is plausible that an underlying schema exists that can be activated by a strong information flow.

Our data provide four tests of this contrast. People tend spontaneously to link ideological labels with equality issues (Conover & Feldman, 1981), suggesting an underlying schema linking the two. It also seems likely that widespread schemas exist linking general political equality values to issues involving equality for specific groups, even though the general values items do not mention any specific group and the issue items do not explicitly mention equality. While domestic spending is not obviously linked to equality beliefs people do seem to link increases in domestic spending to general equality values; all federal administrations since Hoover's have advocated federal programs as a mechanism for insuring a universal minimum level of nutrition,

housing, health care, and so on. And finally, many people may spontaneously link equality values regarding one group with equality policies favoring another. For example, a commitment to equality for blacks might be seen as linked with affirmative action for women. Although the manifest symbolism in the two sets of attitude objects may not be the same, one can imagine that some common underlying schema could be evoked.

In the first of these instances, general political equality values have strong effects upon issue preferences, but only on issues that themselves focus on group equality (and therefore probably have equality-linked schemas) and only among the highly informed. As can be seen in the top four panels of Table 3, the unstandardized coefficients for general equality values on the issues that deal explicitly with group well-being are higher for the highly informed than the less informed in seven of eight cases. Half of the coefficients for the highly informed are significant; none of those for the poorly informed are. The effects of general equality among the highly informed are even stronger than is suggested in Table 3. General and specific values are more strongly linked among the highly informed than among the less informed for both gender values ($r_{high} = .56$, $r_{low} = .24$) and racial values ($r_{high} = .55$, $r_{low} = .31$). This means that general values alone more strongly affect group related issue preferences among the highly informed. It also provides further evidence for schema usage among this group.

In other words, general political values significantly influence preferences on women's and racial issues, even though the value and issue attitude objects are quite dissimilar, but only among the highly informed.[4] Presumably

there is a fairly common underlying schema linking notions of general political equality to special government aid to disadvantaged groups, but this underlying schema is only evoked by higher levels of information.

A second finding supporting the schematic variant is that general equality values have greater impact on support for government spending among the highly than among the less informed. The reasoning is the same: there is no manifest similarity in symbolism between general equality values and preferences about government spending on a variety of concrete service areas, but there may be a widespread underlying schema that links the two. The relevant data are in the fifth panel of Tables 3 and 4. The effect of general political equality is much stronger among the highly informed (B = .33 and .27, both significant) than among the less informed (B = .09 and -.03, neither significant).

One final test proves to fit the schematic variant only modestly. There is no manifest symbolic similarity between equality values specific to one group and policies that foster equality for another. A simple symbolic politics theory would suggest that even information could not produce consistency, but one could imagine a linking schema that could be evoked by heavy information flow. However, in this case the data do fit the schematic variant only imperfectly. Among the highly informed, specific gender values significantly affect positions on racial issues (beta = .23) and specific racial values significantly affect positions on government involvement for women (beta = .45). For the less informed, only the second of these is significant (betas of .22 and .31, respectively). But the more appropriate comparison, of the

unstandardized coefficients, reveal little evidence of the expected information effect.

Three of these four cases, though, do provide support for the schematic point of view. The impact of abstract political orientations (ideological label and general political equality) upon policy preferences with quite different manifest political symbolism (policies to implement group equality, or support for increased domestic government spending) is enhanced by high information flow. To repeat, our interpretation is that in these cases of weak manifest symbolic overlap of attitudes but probably underlying schema, heavy information flow evokes the schema and hence enhances consistency.[5]

The Basic Level of Processing

We appear to have some evidence for a widespread equality schema that can be evoked among those exposed to more political information and which results in a variety of issues being linked via equality beliefs. Part of our goal in measuring attitudes at three levels of abstraction was to determine which was the "basic" level of processing information about group equality. We have seen that there are fairly strong relationships between adjacent levels of abstraction. General political values contribute fairly strongly to domain-specific values, and domain-specific values in turn contribute strongly to concrete policy preferences. Can we say something about the "basic" level of processing information about equality if we probe these data further?

If the "basic" level of processing is more concrete and fine-grained for experts in the content area, as is often assumed, perhaps women would process

more concretely in the area of gender equality, in which they presumably have more experience than do men. So the schematic variant would lead us to expect that women would be processing at a more concrete level than men on gender-related issues, but not on other issues. On the other hand, a simple symbolic politics approach would suggest that the most useful level of abstraction would just be the one whose symbols most closely match those of the dependent variable.

Our data support the symbolic politics view in three respects, but with some interesting exceptions that seem to require a schematic explanation. These exceptions are principally related to group differences; in particular the tendency for women to apply gender values more widely than men. Several of our issues revolve principally around equality for women and blacks -- the three women's issues and the racial issues scale. In all of these cases, domain-specific values are more important predictors of issue positions than are general values or ideology, as we have already indicated. This was shown in Table 1. Moreover, Table 5 shows this to be true for men as well as women: with one exception, the betas for domain-specific values are high and significant, with a mean of .46, whereas the betas for general values are always small and non-significant, with a mean of .08. This does not mean, however, that general values are completely unrelated to issue positions for men. They tend to link general and gender values more strongly than do women (r_{men} = .59, r_{women} = .40) although there are no gender differences in the strength of connection between general and racial values (r_{men} = .46, r_{women} = .43). This means that general values alone do account for more variance in gender

issues for men than for women (the average increment in R^2 over and above demographics and political orientation is .110 for men and is .003 for women). Table 4 shows that this processing at the domain-specific level holds for the well-informed as well as for the poorly-informed (mean betas for the relevant domain-specific values were .52 and .41, respectively, and for general values, .06 and -.02). The "basic" level of processing in these cases is domain-specific, presumably because the most salient symbols in those values match the most salient symbols in these four issues. The one exception, men's reactions to government involvement on behalf of women, is one that we will return to below.

In a second set of cases, the attitude objects for general values and issues share the symbol of equality, but not references to specific groups. As would be expected from a symbolic politics approach, general equality values, not domain-specific values, prove to be most potent in these cases. Attitudes toward government spending are best predicted by general equality values and by ideology, as shown in Table 1. Similarly, when the domain-specific values concern gender, the main symbolic overlap with racial issues is equality, and indeed general equality values prove to be the best predictors (at least this is true for the best-informed, as shown in Table 3). In these cases, then, the "basic" level of processing seems to be at the level of general political values, presumably because those values have more symbolic similarity with the issues.

In a third case, evaluations of Ronald Reagan, the attitude object has no manifestly salient symbolism concerned with either groups or equality. It is

easy to speculate rather that the most salient symbolism surrounding him was partisan and ideological. We have already seen in Table 2 that these two political orientations are the primary determinants of evaluations of Reagan, and that both general and domain-specific values add little explanatory power (6% of the variance, all told). The main story again is that the most salient symbols in the attitude object determine the "basic" level of processing; in this case, the most rather than the least abstract available level.

The symbolic politics approach is able to account for much of this variation across levels of abstraction in the "basic" level of processing, then. But there are some exceptions which we think are meaningful, and perhaps call for some consideration of the schematic variant. These exceptions have principally to do with the tendency for women to use gender values as the "basic" level of processing even when the issue makes other symbols more salient. In introducing the idea of schemas we alluded to an alternative way of thinking about schemas that emphasizes group and individual differences in schematic structure and content. Specifically distinctions have been made between novices and experts and the level of abstraction at which they process information. In this study, women process four issues significantly at the level of domain-specific gender values, whereas in each case gender values make no significant contribution for men. These issues are racial issues, government spending, opposition to Reagan, and government involvement with women. The betas in Table 5 show significant effects of gender values for women, and non-significant effects for men, in each of these cases; moreover, the unstandardized coefficients for gender values are greater in each case for women than men.[6] Rather,

men seem to process these issues mostly at a more abstract level; Table 5 shows that the unstandardized coefficients for general equality values are much greater for men than women in three of the four cases (the exception being opposition to Reagan).

What do these four "exceptions" have in common? Why should the "basic" level of processing for women be at the level of gender values, while it seems to be more abstract for men? We can rule out the possibility that men just naturally process at a more abstract level than women, because that seems not to be the case for the issues discussed earlier. Women's use of more concrete categories seem to come at no great expense to processing efficiency, in that the variance accounted for seems roughly comparable no matter which is the "basic" level. For example, the R^2 regarding government spending is .356 for men, processing at the level of general values, and .334 for women, processing at the level of domain-specific values.

What is responsible for these differences in level of processing. What stands out here is that women are using gender values to process issues that have no manifest gender symbolism, whereas men seem to behave more in line with a simple symbolic politics theory, moving up to a more general level of processing in the absence of group-specific symbolism. The line of explanation we chose to pursue assumed that women, because of their greater experience with the problems of gender equality, can apply gender equality values to areas that men cannot. In other words, the "basic" level of processing for women will be at the group-specific level of gender values even for issues with little or no manifest gender symbolism, because of their special experience with problems of gender.

Other evidence suggests that being an "expert" about a content domain leads to processing information about it that is more detailed and complex (Linville & Jones, 1980). The reason presumably is that an expert has a more detailed category system than does a novice. This leads to the hypothesis that women process political information in these domains at a more concrete level because they are more expert in particular in the matter of women in society. One could imagine this greater expertise stemming from either or both of two independent sources. One is personal experience, such as working as a woman in what has been largely a male-dominated occupational world. A second is heightened political sensitivity to political issues involving women, which would perhaps lead to more detailed knowledge about women's issues and therefore to more refined thinking about them.

The next step was to test whether these two special types of expertise accounted for women's tendencies to process these latter three issues at a more specific level than did men. We operationalized personal experience as having a working woman in the household, and knowledge about women's issues in terms of familiarity with political candidates' positions on women's issues. The key question then becomes which of these dimensions accounts for the tendency to process at the specific rather than the general political level. Statistically this would be revealed in an interaction between expertise and general values: general values would predict issue preferences among non-experts, but would fail to do so among experts.

To test this hypothesis, we adopted a model analogous to an analysis of covariance, in which general equality values were treated as the covariate.

The specific terms included in the model were interactions between general equality and (1) personal experience (i.e., having a working woman in the household), (2) knowledge of women's issues (i.e., familiarity with politicians' positions on women's issues), and (3) gender itself. Unfortunately, the results obtained add nothing to the gender main effects just described. Women were less likely to apply general equality values to government involvement in women's issues ($F(1,226)=7.47; p < .01$), government spending ($F(1,226)=4.83; p < .01$), and more likely to apply it to Reagan ($F(1,226)=12.32; p < .01$). In the latter case the result really reflected the fact that men never thought of equality in connection with Reagan whereas women thought primarily of gender equality (see Table 5). None of the interactions with personal experience of knowledge were significant. Thus the gender difference in basic level of processing is not accounted for by the greater expertise of women concerning women's issues. Nor have we been able to derive further insights from these data into the reasons for this gender difference.

Discussion

This paper had three goals: to test a simple, affect-driven symbolic politics theory, to explore ways in which it must be elaborated to incorporate more complex notions of cognitive structure, and to shed light on the role that egalitarian values play in determining domestic policy preferences. To relate the inquiry to cognitive structuring, we varied level of abstraction and tested for the level of cognitive organization in respondents' attitudes.

We would assume that for most Americans, values about equality fall into the same general content domain as their feelings about such familiar political symbols as liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, or such groups as feminists, blacks, and so on. We doubt that most Americans' values about equality are part of a larger deductive structure headed by some abstract ideology. Rather, the affects people have toward symbols of equality are no doubt correlated with (but scarcely identical to) their affects toward the other major political symbols. Thus the research focused on equality for women and blacks as specific content areas, in part for their own sake but in part because we felt the symbolic politics of group equality would resemble that in other content areas.

It was first necessary to demonstrate that values did not have effects wholly redundant with those of liberal/conservative ideology. This was the case: equality values had considerable explanatory power independent of ideology for almost all of the issues considered, particularly for those dealing with government policy regarding group inequalities.

Much of the evidence testified to the value of a simple symbolic politics theory. In a number of different ways, similarity of the symbols contained in pairs of attitude objects led to greater consistency of affective response, whether the attitude objects were at the same or different levels of abstraction. The domain-specific value gender equality and racial equality scales tended to be quite internally consistent, suggesting that the symbols of equality for a particular group evoked fairly constant affects. The same was true of issue preferences regarding policies promoting each group's

equality, again presumably reflecting consistent affective responses to similar symbols. Values concerning equality for any particular group strongly influenced issue positions concerning that group's equality, but not those concerning other issues. General political equality values had quite strong effects upon values for the equality of a particular group. And gender equality values were fairly strongly influenced by affects toward the two constituent symbols, equality in general and gender.

Other evidence for a symbolic politics theory came from examining the effects of information flow. A symbolic politics theory would assume that high levels of information flow would not be needed to produce consistency in these cases of manifest symbolic similarity, and this held true; even the poorly informed had highly consistent attitudes between manifestly similar objects, such as gender equality values and gender equality policy issues.

Some of the data on processing attitude objects at different levels of abstraction, especially differences across issues in the "basic level" of processing, seemed also to follow from a symbolic politics theory. When values and issues shared common group symbols, processing was at a concrete, domain-specific level. When they shared only symbols of general equality, processing tended to be at that more general level; and when they shared only the most general symbols of ideology and partisanship, it tended to be at that level. Symbolic similarity, rather than level of abstraction, proved to be decisive in governing the level of abstraction at which processing was most effective.

On the other hand, affect toward blacks simply failed to have the effects a simple symbolic politics theory would have expected, explaining differences between neither racial equality values nor issue preferences. The notion that simple affects drive political attitudes is central to a symbolic politics formulation. One possibility is that the measures of racial affect may be suspect. Whites do often dissimulate when asked directly for their affects about blacks (e.g., Crosby et al, 1980; McConahay et al, 1981), which would introduce high levels of unreliability and unpredictability into these measures. It is possible, though, that group affect has its expected influence primarily when embedded in some appropriate cognitive structure, contrary to the simplest version of a symbolic politics approach. Kinder and Sears (1981) made this argument in their discussion of "symbolic racism."

Several other pieces of evidence support the value of a schematic variant of the symbolic politics approach. Most notably, it would propose that greater information flow plays a crucial role in increasing consistency of response to attitude objects with little manifest symbolic similarity, when some underlying cognitive structure, or schema, already connects them. Like the simpler symbolic politics theory, it would suggest that strong information flow is unnecessary when the two attitude objects are already manifestly very similar, since consistency will emerge in any case. And even strong information flow would have little effect when two attitude objects are manifestly dissimilar and no underlying linking schema exists that information can activate. This general proposition was tested in a number of ways and fit the data fairly well.[7]

A second area of positive evidence for schematic organization was generated by a search for differences in the "basic" level of processing. General political values proved not to generate as much internal consistency or have as much power over issue positions as did domain-specific values. Even when manifest symbolic content was held constant, by considering both "equality" in general and affect toward the group in question, domain-specific values remain the most powerful determinants of issue positions. This suggests that some more cognitive principles need to be added. For example, very general values may be so abstract that they lend themselves too easily to changed meaning with minor changes of context. The result may be that domain-specific values are at a more useful, "basic" level of processing. The meaning of more abstract symbols may be easily changed by being placed in a new context (Asch, 1948). "Equality" may mean something quite different depending on its context, and in the abstract its meaning may not be very stable. Another possibility is that the "basic" level of processing political values embeds them in a group context, rather than dealing with them at either an abstract or a self-oriented level.

A third source of support for a schematic variant came from testing the hypothesis that the "basic" level of processing becomes more concrete as the individual becomes more expert in the area in question. Since women presumably have more experience with issues of gender equality than do men, we thought they might process them at a more concrete level. We found, as indicated above, that the "basic" level of processing was dictated most clearly by whichever level of abstraction contained symbols that most closely matched

those of the issue in question, as a simple symbolic politics theory would suggest. But we did find some interesting differences between the genders, suggesting differences in their basic levels of processing equality issues. Women tended to approach policy questions concerning equality from the perspective of their gender equality values, whereas men tended more to apply general equality values or more abstract political orientations. It is not that women do not link issues with abstract symbols, or have general political equality values, because they do. But their reactions to political issues had more to do with their more concrete, domain-specific values.[8] Men, on the other hand, based their reactions to group issues on all versions of equality, general political, gender, and racial equality, tending to use those that matched the issue symbols most closely.

The explanation for these gender differences is not altogether obvious. It has frequently been found that group membership affects the complexity with which in-group and out-group members are viewed. In-group members tend to look at each other in a more differentiated way than they look at out-group members (Linville & Jones, 1980; Linville, 1982; Brewer & Lui, 1983). We may have an analogous finding here; women think more complexly about issues that involve their group and thus are less likely to react to women's issues from an abstract stance about general political equality.

Alternatively, it was suggested women may think differently about women's issues because they have a personal involvement with them. There is some evidence from social cognition research that systematic, careful processing of information is more likely when personal involvement is high (Borgida &

Howard-Pitney, 1983). We could not, however, find conclusive evidence that personal involvement or more knowledge about women's issues were more powerfully related to processing issues at a more general level. Our measures for both of these constructs were weak and need to be improved before this issue can be resolved. Analyses conducted within this study suggest that group membership per se was the single determinant of the basic level of schema processing, which would support findings from the in-group out-group research. However, this conclusion needs to also be tested on other groups, particularly racial and ethnic groups.

All of the above suggests that symbolic content was the crucial variable in determining response to issues, but there also was evidence that some form of cognitive structure was being imposed upon these symbols. Do we really have evidence for an equality schema? In order for the schematic variant of the symbolic politics theory to be tenable, certain minimal criteria must be met. The term "minimal" must be taken seriously. Because of the limitations faced in gathering the data for this study, many of the methods normally employed to test schema theories (such as requests for information, recall/recognition errors, reaction time, etc.) were rendered impossible. Therefore, our evidence for a schematic variant of the theory of symbolic politics -- a variant that we will suggest consists of a hierarchical ordering of symbols -- may be considered provocative but by no means definitive.

Schemas are characterized by the organization of information but also have dynamic functions. They are thought to affect information processing, retrieval and inference (Fiske & Linville, 1980; Fiske & Taylor, 1984). We

have no direct evidence that equality schemas fill any of these latter functions and this is obviously needed before we can confidently employ the schema concept.

In discussing an equality schema we have said nothing about its generality. It is obviously powerfully linked to all four group interest issues but only minimally associated with support for Reagan or endorsement for the provision of government services. This suggests that the schema is appropriately applied to group interest issues in which equality is frequently a salient symbol. The schema is not applied undiscerningly to all political issues but its exact issue domain has yet to be ascertained.

Our ideas have been developed within the context of equality symbols and group interest political issues. We have suggested a hierarchical organization of these and related symbols. In addition, and to make things more complex, this organization also depends on group membership. Before we can confidently call the organization of equality symbols a schema we need to investigate the following questions. What are the actual contents of such a schema? Does everybody have one? (Our results from political non-sophisticates suggest that the answer may be no.) Does this schema truly influence the processing of political information, information retrieval and inferences made about associated symbols and issues?

The schematic variant of a symbolic politics theory has ramifications that extend beyond the investigation of equality. It argues for a thorough mapping of the symbolic domain. Is there a finite number of symbol schemas linked to the major values thought to affect American political thinking?

How are symbols organized within these structures? It also argues for further investigation of the relationship between issues and symbols. Is there a discrete relationship between schemas and issues? Will we attain far greater precision in the prediction of public opinion once we have isolated a relatively stable set of symbolic schemas and their relevant issues?

Investigations along these lines could also promote the study of affect and schemas. What we are postulating are basically cognitive structures of affect. Questions as yet unanswered within the social cognition literature such as the piecemeal versus systematic processing of affect within schematic structures (Fiske & Pavelchak, 1983) will arise within such a line of investigation.

FOOTNOTES

*We owe thanks to the staff of the Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, and to the 1984 Study Committee, National Election Studies, for collecting and distributing the data. Financial support for data collection was provided by the National Science Foundation, for data analysis by the College of Letters and Science and the Office of Academic Computing at UCLA, and for manuscript preparation by the Cattell Foundation. Special thanks are also owed Carolyn Drago and Stanley Feldman for their help at various stages of the project. The project was conducted while the senior author was a Guest Scholar at the Brookings Institution.

1. The univariate correlations of general, gender, and racial equality with ideology were .25, .26, and .41, scarcely strong enough to argue that values are simply subsumed in ideology.
2. This lesser predictive power of the general domain-specific values is not solely due to their lesser reliability. When the more reliable three-item scale is substituted for the six-item general equality values scale, the results are very similar. For example, the R^2 estimates for row 2 in Table 2 are .294, .290, .107, .493, .403, and .350, in order, yielding an average increase of 3% in R^2. The average increment in unique R^2 contributed by the general values (row 9) was 16.2% and by domain-specific values (row 10) was 8.7%.

3. In both cases, the feminist scale produces highly significant betas, of .36 and .34, while "women" does so only in the former case, yielding .29 and .10, respectively. See Sears, Huddy, and Schaffer (1984).
4. Part of the explanation for the greater effect of general political values on issue preferences among the highly informed may be due to greater internal consistency of the value scale for this group. We cannot rule this possibility out. The Cronbach's alpha for the highly informed group was much higher than for the less informed (.57 vs. .19).
5. The simple symbolic politics theory does have an escape clause here. It could be that the information environment systematically pairs two quite dissimilar attitude objects over time. If so, massive exposure to that information flow would ultimately lead to a linking of the two objects, even in the absence of preexisting schemas. Such was the case, for example, with Lyndon Johnson and a Vietnam/warmonger image. Prior to the Vietnam War he was not seen as a very hawkish or warlike politician. A simple symbolic politics theory would be able to account for a finding that those two attitudes were most consistent among the best informed in the late 1960s.
6. These gender differences appear in both the standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients, as shown in Table 5. The unstandardized coefficients for gender values on these latter three issues are all greater for women than men, averaging .25 and .05, respectively. For general equality values, the pattern was reversed on the government aid to women and government spending issues (for women, -.04 and .08; for men, .45 and .46). For Reagan opposition,

general political orientations had strong effects for both sexes, as shown in Table 5.

7. As indicated earlier, one could operationalize information flow directly, by measuring transmission information to the individual, or indirectly, by simply measuring the individual's volume of information. We opted for the latter, but doing so opens up the possibility that our index of information flow instead actually indexes the presence or absence of schemas. We are willing to tolerate this ambiguity in this exploratory venture, but resolving it would have a high priority in further work.
8. This finding has some interesting implications for the measurement of values. It certainly cautions against measuring values at their most abstract. It also argues for a careful exploration of values within a context, particularly when the context is directly relevant to the group under investigation.

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FIGURE 1

An Equality Schema:
Specific Values as the Basic Level

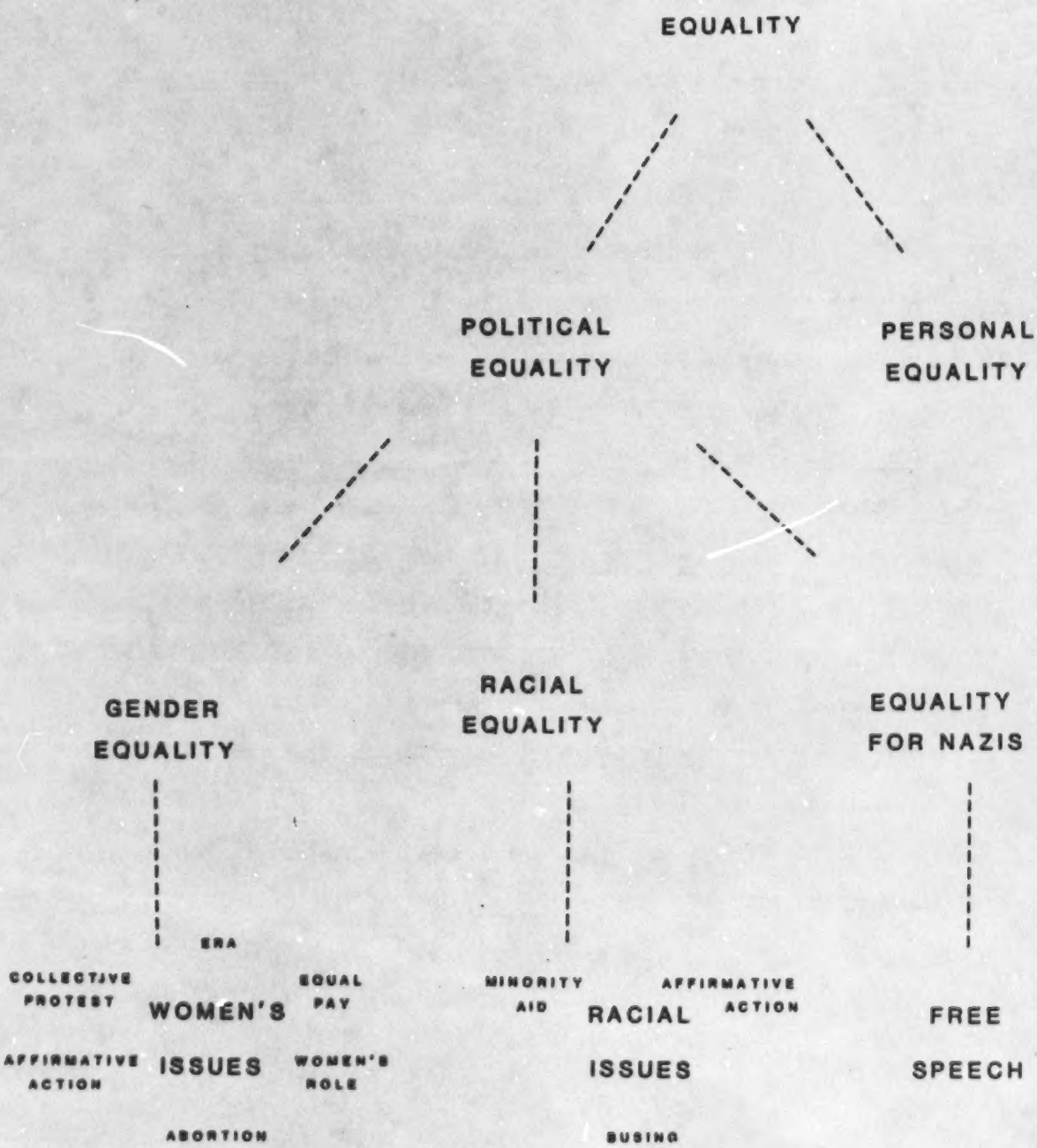

Table 1

The Effects of Demographic Variables and Political Orientation on Issue Preferences

	WOMEN'S ISSUES			RACIAL ISSUES	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	OPPOSITION TO REAGAN
	Government Involvement	Non-traditional Beliefs	Collective Action			
DEMOGRAPHICS						
Age (old)	.14	-.18*	.12	.20**	.05	.01
Education (high)	-.14	.14	.16	.13	-.33**	-.08
Gender (female)	.14	.07	.01	.10	.09	.11
Race (black)	.10	.10	.17	.26**	.14	.21*
Income (high)	-.09	.05	.00	-.23**	-.14	-.09
POLITICAL ORIENTATION						
Ideology (liberal)	.35**	.48**	.31**	.35**	.39**	.27**
Party I.D. (Democrat)	.02	.16	.07	.09	.10	.30**
ADJUSTED R^2	.161	.269	.070	.402	.358	.334

Note: All entries are standardized beta weights

*p < .05

**p < .01

Table 2

The Effects of Values and Group Affect on All Issues: Adjusted R^2

	WOMEN'S ISSUES			RACIAL ISSUES	GOVERNMENT SERVICES	REAGAN
	Government Involvement	Traditional Role	Collective Action			
REGRESSION EQUATIONS						
1) Demographics + Political Orientation	.161	.269	.070	.402	.358	.334
2) 1 + Gen'l. Political Equality Values	.244	.302	.082	.499	.418	.360
3) 1 + Domain-Specific Equality Values	.313	.533	.237	.625	.377	.395
4) 1 + All Values	.326	.532	.233	.641	.414	.394
5) 1 + Group Affect	.201	.494	.174	.399	.380	.359
6) 2 + Group Affect	.284	.520	.190	.496	.430	.378
7) 3 + Group Affect	.315	.642	.282	.621	.388	.396
8) 4 + Group Affect	.335	.639	.276	.638	.426	.396
DIFFERENCES IN R^2						
9) Role of Equality Values (4-1)	.165	.263	.163	.139	.056	.060
10) Role of Gen'l. Political Equality Values (4-3)	.013	.000	.000	.016	.037	.000
11) Role of Domain-Specific Values (4-2)	.082	.230	.151	.142	.000	.034
12) Role of Affect (5-1)	.040	.225	.104	.000	.028	.023

Note: Each entry is an adjusted R^2 estimate and represents a separate regression equation. The domain-specific values focused on gender, except that racial equality was used for the racial values.

Table 3

The Effects of Political Information on

the Determinants of Issue Positions

(Unstandardized Regression Coefficients)

	Subsample 1 (Domain-specific= gender equality)		Subsample 2 (Domain-specific= racial equality)	
	hi info	lo info	hi info	lo info
WOMEN'S ISSUES				
Government Involvement				
Political Orientation	.50(.19)*	.03(.22)	.34(.18)	.11(.21)
Gen'l. Political Equality	.12(.11)	.22(.17)	.20(.12)	.01(.14)
Domain-specific Equality	.29(.08)**	.28(.12)*	.33(.08)**	.17(.08)*
Adjusted R^2	.382	.196	.504	.263
Traditional Roles				
Political Orientation	.13(.13)	.01(.26)	.48(.20)*	-.29(.26)
Gen'l. Political Equality	-.01(.07)	-.26(.15)	.28(.13)*	.14(.17)
Domain-specific Equality	.47(.05)**	.40(.10)**	.15(.09)	.21(.10)*
Adjusted R^2	.694	.177	.236	.097
Collective Action				
Political Orientation	.12(.11)	.01(.13)	.19(.11)	.07(.14)
Gen'l. Political Equality	-.03(.06)	-.05(.09)	.20(.07)**	-.11(.09)
Domain-specific Equality	.17(.05)**	.27(.07)**	.02(.05)	.18(.05)**
Adjusted R^2	.221	.177	.244	.282
RACIAL ISSUES				
Political Orientation	.07(.20)	-.31(.25)	.39(.14)**	.45(.25)
Gen'l. Political Equality	.40(.12)**	.23(.18)	.21(.09)*	.06(.16)
Domain-specific Equality	.16(.08)	.20(.13)	.40(.06)**	.25(.09)**
Adjusted R^2	.351	.112	.720	.476

Table 3

(continued)

	Subsample 1 (Domain-specific= gender equality)		Subsample 2 (Domain-specific= racial equality)	
	hi info	lo info	hi info	lo info
GOVERNMENT SPENDING				
Political Orientation	.40(.17)*	.39(.18)*	.63(.19)**	.45(.22)
Gen'l. Political Equality	.33(.10)**	.09(.14)	.27(.12)*	-.03(.15)
Domain-specific Equality	.01(.07)	.09(.10)	.20(.08)*	.05(.08)
Adjusted R^2	.411	.171	.433	.190
REAGAN				
Political Orientation	1.36(.27)**	.19(.26)	1.44(.22)**	1.56(.33)**
Gen'l. Political Equality	.00(.16)	.07(.19)	.06(.14)	.32(.22)
Domain-specific Equality	.27(.11)*	.20(.14)	.16(.09)	-.04(.12)
Adjusted R^2	.423	.186	.594	.374

Note: For each issue, four separate regressions were conducted: within each of two subsamples, separately for the high and low informed. The entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Political orientation includes ideology and party identification. In subsample 1, the domain-specific values were gender equality; in subsample 2, racial equality. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Table 4

The Effects of Political Information on
the Determinants of Issue Positions
(Standardized Regression Coefficients)

	Subsample 1 (Domain-specific= gender equality)		Subsample 2 (Domain-specific= racial equality)	
	hi info	lo info	hi info	lo info
WOMEN'S ISSUES				
Government Involvement				
Political Orientation	.28*	.02	.17	.07
Gen'l. Political Equality	.13	.16	.19	.01
Domain-specific Equality	.40**	.30*	.45**	.31*
Adjusted R^2	.382	.196	.504	.263
Traditional Roles				
Political Orientation	.07	.01	.28*	-.18
Gen'l. Political Equality	-.02	-.23	.29*	.15
Domain-specific Equality	.69**	.50**	.23	.33*
Adjusted R^2	.694	.177	.236	.097
Collective Action				
Political Orientation	.12	.01	.20	.07
Gen'l. Political Equality	-.07	-.07	.37**	-.19
Domain-specific Equality	.45**	.52**	.05	.47**
Adjusted R^2	.221	.177	.244	.282
RACIAL ISSUES				
Political Orientation	.04	-.19	.19**	.23
Gen'l. Political Equality	.45**	.18	.19*	.06
Domain-specific Equality	.23	.22	.55**	.33**
Adjusted R^2	.351	.112	.720	.476

Table 4

(continued)

	Subsample 1 (Domain-specific= gender equality)		Subsample 2 (Domain-specific= racial equality)	
	hi info	lo info	hi info	lo info
GOVERNMENT SPENDING				
Political Orientation	.23*	.29*	.32**	.30
Gen'l. Political Equality	.38**	.09	.25*	-.04
Domain-specific Equality	.01	.12	.29*	.09
Adjusted R^2	.411	.171	.433	.190
REAGAN				
Political Orientation	.50**	.10	.55**	.63**
Gen'l. Political Equality	.00	.05	.05	.23
Domain-specific Equality	.26*	.19	.17	-.04
Adjusted R^2	.423	.186	.594	.374

Note: Entries are standardized regression coefficients.

*p .05

**p .01

Table 5

Gender Differences in the Determinants of Issue Positions

	Male Respondents		Female Respondents	
	Unstandardized	Beta	Unstandardized	Beta
WOMEN'S ISSUES				
Government Involvement				
Political Orientation	.44(.23)	.24	.24(.19)	.14
Gen'l. Political Equality	.45(.13)	.47**	-.04(.13)	-.03
Gender Equality	.10(.12)	.11	.37(.08)	.52**
Adjusted R^2	.399	.399	.222	.222
Traditional Roles				
Political Orientation	.15(.16)	.10	.09(.17)	.06
Gen'l. Political Equality	-.01(.09)	-.01	-.10(.11)	-.09
Gender Equality	.48(.08)	.63**	.39(.07)	.57**
Adjusted R^2	.574	.574	.409	.409
Collective Action				
Political Orientation	.01(.14)	.01	.11(.10)	.11
Gen'l. Political Equality	.00(.08)	.00	-.06(.07)	-.11
Gender Equality	.20(.07)	.43**	.21(.05)	.53**
Adjusted R^2	.152	.152	.243	.243

Table 5
(continued)

	Male Respondents		Female Respondents	
	Unstandardized	Beta	Unstandardized	Beta
RACIAL ISSUES				
Political Orientation	.05(.27)	.023	-.15(.19)	-.10
Gen'l. Political Equality	.57(.15)	.57**	.16(.13)	.16
Gender Equality	.05(.14)	.06	.21(.08)	.33*
Adjusted R^2	.307	.307	.217	.217
RACIAL ISSUES				
Political Orientation	.41(.22)	.17	.41(.15)	.24**
Gen'l. Political Equality	.22(.12)	.21	.16(.10)	.15
Racial Equality	.33(.08)	.45**	.37(.07)	.51**
Adjusted R^2	.307	.307	.217	.217
GOVERNMENT SPENDING				
Political Orientation	.40(.23)	.22	.52(.15)	.37**
Gen'l. Political Equality	.46(.13)	.49**	.08(.10)	.08
Gender Equality	-.13(.12)	-.15	.13(.06)	.23*
Adjusted R^2	.356	.356	.334	.334
REAGAN				
Political Orientation	.76(.32)	.30*	.17(.23)	.44**
Gen'l. Political Equality	-.02(.18)	-.01	.24(.15)	.16
Gender Equality	.17(.17)	.14	.24(.10)	.26*
Adjusted R^2	.336	.336	.350	.350

Note: Standard errors shown in parentheses. *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Appendix A

Item Wording for Equality Value Scales at the General, Gender, and Racial Levels

	MEAN	SD
General Political Equality		
1. If people were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems.[a]	3.97	1.42
2. Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.[a]	4.35	1.15
3. One of the big problems in this country is that we don't give everyone an equal chance.[a]	3.13	1.63
4. We should give up on the goal of equality since people are so different to begin with.	4.02	1.41
5. Some people are just better cut out than others for important positions in society.	1.87	1.28
6. Some people are better at running things and should be allowed to do so.	1.42	0.86
General Political Equality Scale	18.77	4.09
Gender Equality		
1. If men and women were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems.[a]	3.70	1.44
2. Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that women's opportunities to succeed are equal to those of men.[a]	4.30	1.18
3. One of the big problems in this country is that we don't give women an equal chance.[a]	2.95	1.54
4. We should give up on the goal of equality since men and women are so different to begin with.	4.15	1.24

Appendix A

(continued)

	MEAN	SD
5. Men are just better cut out than women for important positions in society.	3.81	1.50
6. Men are better at running things than women are and should be allowed to do so.	4.30	1.18
Gender Equality Scale	22.76	5.41
Racial Equality		
1. If blacks and whites were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems.[a]	3.77	1.52
2. Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that blacks' opportunities to succeed are equal to those of whites.[a]	4.30	1.12
3. One of the big problems in this country is that we don't give blacks an equal chance.[a]	3.14	1.58
4. We should give up on the goal of equality since blacks and whites are so different to begin with.	4.37	1.18
5. Whites are just better cut out than blacks for important positions in society.	4.52	0.91
6. Whites are better at running things than blacks are and should be allowed to do so.	4.29	1.07
Racial Equality Scale	24.38	4.45

Note: All items are based on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) agreement scale.

a. These items reversed to construct scale.